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INFO RUEHXQ/ALL EUROPEAN UNION POST COLLECTIVE
RUEHXC/ALL US CONSULATES IN MEXICO COLLECTIVE
RUEHGT/AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA 3809
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0477
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 2517
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 0174
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1098

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 05 MEXICO 001194

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/MEX, WHA/PDA, STATE FOR OES/IHB, PA, CAPRESS;
STATE FOR MED/DASHO (MCFADDEN, RINALDO, KEYES); STATE FOR
MED/DIR (PENNER); STATE FOR DS/IP/WHA; CDC FOR
CCID/NCPDCID, CCID/NCIRD AND COGH/DGPPC

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SUBJECT: SITREP 5 - H1N1 FLU OUTBREAK IN MEXICO CITY

1. (U) SUMMARY:

April 28 estimates of confirmed H1N1 cases and deaths remain unchanged from April 27. On April 28, 2009, the Mayor of Mexico City ordered the closure of all establishments where large numbers of the public gather until May 6, including restaurants, bars, discos, night clubs, cinemas, movie theaters, theaters, gyms, and convention centers.

2. (U) FEDERAL AND CITY GOVERNMENT ACTIONS:

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT:

--Navy Secretary Mariano Saynez offered the Navy's Hospital of high specialty located in Mexico City. Saynez noted that the Navy has trained physicians and nurses to face emergencies such as the H1N1 flu. The hospital has a capacity for 600 emergency cases. (Note: Anecdotal evidence suggests that public and private hospitals in Mexico are experiencing shortages of space as well as mechanical ventilators. We are currently seeking firm statistics on this. End Note.)
--The Health Secretariat announced they would dispatch rescue teams of doctors nationwide in coordination with IMSS (the National Social Security Institute), ISSTE (The State Social Security Institute), and the Red Cross to reinforce measures to prevent the spread of the virus.
--The Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) announced a hotline to keep citizens informed on government actions and decisions related to the H1N1 flu. Within Mexico City the number is 3601-7599; if calling outside Mexico City, the number is 01-800-288-6688.
--The Secretariat of Finance and Public Credit announced an urgent fund to investigate the H1N1 virus. The amount of this fund was not disclosed.

MEXICO CITY GOVERNMENT:

-- On April 28, 2009, the Mayor of Mexico City ordered the closure of all establishments where large numbers of the public gather until May 6, including restaurants, bars, discos, night clubs, cinemas, movie theaters, theaters, gyms, and convention centers.

--Announced a fund of 150 million pesos in support for families, workers, and business affected by the H1N1 flu.
--The city government distributed 5 million flyers and 850 thousand information announcements on the H1N1 flu, as well as one million masks throughout the city.

13. (U) ACTIONS BY NON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS:

-- Many private organizations continue to cancel events in support of the GOM's recommendations against large public gatherings.

-- The National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) established an emergency committee on the H1N1 flu headed by Rector Jose Narro, former Undersecretary of Health and Director of the Medical School at UNAM.

14. (SBU) STATISTICS:

Emboffs accompanying the CDC team in Mexico City report updated H1N1 flu case estimates of:

--1324 suspected cases
--84 suspected death cases
--26 confirmed cases
--7 confirmed deaths

At a press conference on the evening of April 28, the

MEXICO 00001194 002 OF 005

Secretariat of Health reported:

-- There were 2498 potential influenza cases reported in April. Of these, there were 159 deaths, but only 7 confirmed as H1N1 flu) all of which were in Mexico City. The GOM will have the final test results for the other 152 death cases within the next 24 hours.

--There are currently 1311 people hospitalized with severe influenza. Out of these, 26 are confirmed H1N1 flu cases.

--The number of reported cases have decreased in the past four days.

We continue to have problems obtaining consistent government statistical data.

15. (U) MANAGEMENT ISSUES:

The Embassy issued approximately 552 masks to U.S. direct hire employees, their families, and locally employed staff. The Health Unit has sent specimens for 8 patients with flu-like symptoms to the U.S. for testing. One specimen result has returned probable for the H1N1 virus; results of the others are still pending.

PCS travel to post continues as normal.

16. (U) SECURITY ISSUES:

Although Embassy security was adequate, RSO noted a significant uptick in absenteeism of local guards and police on April 28. RSO will continue to monitor the activity of Embassy guards and police closely.

17. (U) CONSULAR ISSUES:

-- U.S. EMBASSY: The Embassy issued an updated warden message April 28, the fifth in five days, and the U.S. Department of State revised the travel alert for Mexico. The message refers to the government of Mexico City's ordered closure of all establishments where large numbers of the public gather until May 6.

Embassy Mexico received approximately 550 H1N1-flu related calls on April 28, a dramatic increase compared to 120 on April 27. Most of the callers were inquiring about the schedule for Consular Services (non-essential public services were suspended on April 27) and travel restrictions to the U.S.

-- CONSULATE, CIUDAD JUAREZ: Non-immigrant visa operations at the Consulate General will be suspended until May 6th. Immigrant visa operations are suspended from April 30 through May 8th. Applicants that are impacted by these suspensions will be notified through the Consulate's website and the call center. Consular services for U.S. citizens will be limited to emergency assistance and to citizenship applications (passports and consular reports of birth abroad, or CRBA). Notarial and other routine services will not be available; anyone with passport or CRBA appointments is encouraged, but not required, to reschedule to a later date. Additionally, Federal Benefits Units are requesting all persons to postpone interviews on Social Security claims.

-- U.S. CONSULATE GENERAL, GUADALAJARA. Despite posting a notice on the consulate website and issuing a press release that received ample local coverage, approximately 200 NIV

MEXICO 00001194 003 OF 005

applicants arrived for their previously scheduled appointments. They claimed to have not known about the closure. Those who arrived were processed. There were no reports of emergency travel, and there was no spike in emergency appointment requests. Nevertheless, the section answered approximately 80 calls from applicants concerned about rescheduling their appointments. ACS fielded approximately 60 travel inquiries April 27, and April 28 they responded to approximately 100. The majority of calls today were Amcits asking if they should return to the US. ACS has maintained their normal appointment system, managing approximately 60-70 cases per day. Today, 90 percent of those cases requested emergency passports or CRBAs for immediate travel. Normally, they process 5-10 emergency requests per day. GDL's consular district has no reports of confirmed swine flu cases.

-- U.S. CONSULATE, NOGALES: Visa services have been suspended until May 6th and ACS services are limited to emergencies. Employee absenteeism is within normal limits. On April 27, the ACS chief addressed a group of 125 Maquiladora Association managers to discuss travel conditions and consular operations during the health alert. On April 28, post hosted a meeting of the local Integrated Emergency Management Group to facilitate communications between local Mexican health authorities and Municipal and County first responders from the Nogales area.

-- U.S. CONSULATE, TIJUANA: Visa operations are suspended until May 6th.

-- U.S. CONSULATE, HERMOSILLO: NIV Chief confirmed that visa services have been canceled until May 6th, and will not reopen until Post receives further guidance.

-- U.S. CONSULATE, MERIDA: A small number of visa applicants arrived this morning and were upset when turned away. Post has received an elevated number of calls and e-mails concerning travel to resort destinations. The Consular section prepared language for a recorded phone and e-mail message directing travelers to CDC's and State's Travel Alerts. There is no notable increase in the number of Amcits requesting services. Post has sent out protective masks and

gloves to their Consular Agent offices. Operations remain open, however, post will continue to monitor the situation and adjust accordingly.

-- U.S. CONSULATE, MONTERREY: The Consular Section suspended all NIV services effective April 28, though exceptions were made for some applicants who had already been enrolled at the ASC (offsite Applicant Services Center) April 27 or earlier. All interview windows have hand sanitizers and face masks are available for all consular staff, guards and greeters. ACS received only 15-20 phone calls from Americans in the consular district; all had questions regarding either a rumored possible border closure or how to reschedule NIV interviews for family members or friends.

18. (U) BORDER AND CONSULATE ISSUES:

-- CIUDAD JUAREZ: The Governor of Chihuahua announced on April 27 the cancellation of all public events and schools at least until May 6. Select business establishments, such as discotheques and movie theaters, are also closed state-wide during this same period. Restaurants will remain open. In Ciudad Juarez, Mayor Ferriz announced that municipal authorities set up Mobile Medical Units to treat individuals presenting possible symptoms of swine flu and to distribute medical information at the Ciudad Juarez airport, bus stations, toll booth checkpoints and community centers. There is currently no plan to shut down public transportation or other businesses. On April 28, the Consul General held a

MEXICO 00001194 004 OF 005

town hall meeting with Consulate staff and family members to provide information about the H1N1 outbreak and answer questions.

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-- GUADALAJARA: On April 27, the Governor of Jalisco announced that, in addition to nationally mandated school closings, bars, nightclubs, theaters and restaurants would also be closed. Most businesses are complying. Transportation and tourism contacts do not have specific numbers to reflect the impact of the outbreak, but they expect services to diminish and tourism revenues to reduce as a result. The state government suspended all public cultural activities.

-- NOGALES: Public reaction has been calm. There has been a limited use of face masks in public. Border traffic volume (north bound) at both Nogalas ports of entry is lighter-than normal.

-- MERIDA: Supplies of masks, gloves, and hand sanitizers are non-existent in Merida and post is hearing reports of panic buying in Cancun. The governors of Campeche, Yucatan, and Quintana Roo have canceled public meetings and events. The governor of Yucatan will make a public statement on April 28 or 29 to pass information to consulates and businesses. Consulate staff is not alarmed, but they are visibly concerned. The CLO and MO have been sending information and updates to keep EMFs informed of the latest developments. At least two EMF's have opted to return to the states. The consulate will be holding a town hall meeting today with EFMs and staff to pass information and hear concerns. Protective mask and gloves have been made available to staff, but no one has opted to use them.

-- MONTERREY: The Nuevo Leon government has been proactive, as Governor Gonzalez Paras closed all schools and day care facilities on April 26, before the GOM nationwide order. Pandemic preventive educational programs are being shown on television, including the importance of washing hands and using a surgical mask. The government has asked employers to permit liberal leave policies, especially for mothers who have stayed home with school aged kids. Airports and bus terminals are supplying masks and all travelers are being asked to fill out a questionnaire on their health. Anyone

presenting symptoms is asked to see a doctor or stay home. Many in Nuevo Leon are staying home, as restaurants and bars are fairly empty. There has been a marked decline in street traffic and a 10% decline in air passengers. Private businesses and government offices generally remain open, although some employees have stayed home to care for their children and some have canceled internal meetings.

-- U.S. CONSULATE, TIJUANA: State and local governments within the district have canceled all public events, including events related to International Children's Day and Mother's Day. Post has received reports that some government offices are reducing services, for example the Foreign Relations Secretariat (SRE) has closed satellite offices in Tijuana and Rosarito. The main SRE office in Tijuana remains open for passport processing but allows only 7 people in the waiting room at one time. Other large events have also been voluntarily canceled. No other closures, such as public transportation, stores or restaurants have been ordered at this time

19. (U) MEDIA REACTION/GENERAL POPULATION SENTIMENTS:

Coverage of the swine flu outbreak on April 28 focused on the World Health Organization raising the alert level to 4. All newspapers featured the economic repercussions of the outbreak, which included a fall of 3.34% in the Mexican stock market's main indicator and the depreciation of the peso versus the dollar. Headlines include: &Flu affects the whole country8 (La Cronica); &Virus jumps to other countries8

MEXICO 00001194 005 OF 005

(El Universal); &Health Secretary: Outbreak in its most critical stage8 (El Sol de Mexico); &Flu stops economic recovery8 (El Economista); &WHO: On the threshold of pandemic8 (La Jornada); &WHO raises alert level8 (Reforma). Many newspapers also feature stories of how the U.S. Embassy and other diplomatic missions have limited their services, and photos of Mexicans crowding grocery stores to stock up in case &the city is shut down.8 Noteworthy items in the electronic media are the travel alerts issued by the Department of State and the European Union, and the reports that CBP agents are strengthening inspection methods in the U.S./Mexico border. Although most electronic media newscasts have quoted Secretary Napolitano saying the border will not be closed, a rumor stating otherwise has circulated through some outlets. Media reaction continues to be mostly favorable for President Calderon and the government actions, despite some general criticism that the country is not well prepared for an epidemic outbreak. &Our country is not prepared for these things. But within all that, the reaction of the Calderon administration has been excellent,8 stated Eduardo Ruiz Healy, a well-known radio commentator.

110. (U) ECONOMIC IMPACT

Hotels: Occupancy rates at Mexico City hotels have fallen rapidly. At hotels used regularly by the Embassy, average occupancy is 20-30 percent. Cancellations by groups have been especially severe and the mayor has effectively closed down the hotel convention business.

Foreign Ministry: The Secretariat of Foreign Relations has suspended protocol and diplomatic note traffic between foreign missions and the ministry. A duty team does appear to be on station to receive urgent traffic.

Transportation: A passenger who fell ill on US Airways 804 flight from Cancun to Philadelphia was hospitalized 27 April in Philadelphia but released this morning after the hospital determined she did not have H1N1. Some U.S. airlines that fly to Mexico are beginning to report decreased load factors on southbound flights, but note that U.S.-bound flights remain full. Lufthansa is experiencing a larger drop on its transatlantic route to Mexico, while passenger loads on

flights out of Mexico to Frankfurt are higher than normal.

Economic Impact: The stock exchange dropped slightly in today's trading, -0.75%. The peso appreciated against the dollar from 14.10 pesos to 13.98 pesos to the dollar. Mexico's chamber of commerce estimates losses from business closures and reduced sales will average 777 million pesos (USD 55.5 million) daily, with the biggest losses felt by hotels and restaurants. In annual terms, leading financial institution Banamex predicts a 1 percent flu-effect contraction in GDP.

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